

[Ben Dickstein]

Beliefs and Customs - Pastime

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK Forms to be Filled out for Each Interview

FORM A Circumstances of Interview [6?]

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Arnold Manoff

ADDRESS 27 Hamilton Terrace

DATE Nov. 15, 1938

SUBJECT GAMES PLAYED ON CONCORD AVE: DICKSTEIN

1. Date and time of interview Monday Nov. 14, evening
2. Place of interview 2060 Buhre Ave. Bronx, New York
3. Name and address of informant Ben Dickstein 2060 Buhre Ave. Bronx
4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant
5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you
6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.

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Three room apartment in modern elevator building. Simply furnished with an eye for traditional comfort in the middle class Yiddish style. Parlor contains a nice fat sofa and two easy chairs, radio, two lamps, coffee table. Colors red and green plush. Apartment has shiny unlive-in appearance. Neighborhood is extremely quiet, this building being the only house of its kind as far as the eye can see. Location in Northeast section of Bronx, next to last station on the Pelham Bay line. This is still suburban territory; many empty flat lots and private houses. Reminds one of Long Island; same flat stretches. One hour by train from Grand Central. Many retired and pensioned people live in this area.

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NEW YORK

FORM B Personal History of Informant

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Arnold Manoff

ADDRESS 27 Hamilton Terrace

DATE Nov. 15, 1938

SUBJECT GAMES PLAYED ON CONCORD AVE.: - DICKSTEIN

1. Ancestry RUSSO YIDDISH
2. Place and date of birth New York City some [27?] years ago
3. Family Married no children
4. Places lived in, with dates

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5. Education, with dates College Grad. CCNY 1933

6. Occupations and accomplishments, with dates

Employed as Laboratory Technician by the Westchester Square Hospital Previously
employed by the Bronx Hospital

7. Special skills and interests

8. Community and religious activities

9. Description of informant

Handsome lanky man, prematurely grey hair. Lean quiet face, sprawling lazy manner.

10. Other Points gained in interview.

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NEW YORK

FORM C Text of Interview (Unedited)

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Arnold Manoff

ADDRESS 27 Hamilton Terrace

DATE Nov. 15, 1938

SUBJECT GAMES PLAYED ON CONCORD AVE: - DICKSTEIN

The time I lived on Concord Ave., that was the time when I was a kid and we used to see the nurses from Lincoln Hospital go by every day. Well at night , especially in the summer time , all the kid , came down after supper and we'd get up a game of something. Sometimes we'd play basketball near the light. There was an old hag that lived on the rocks in one of those old wooden shacks. Well we used to play basketball under the light near the rocks and she had a flight of wooden steps that you had to climb to get on the rocks. There was a slit like on top of the steps and that was the basket. Oh yeah we played Ringo Leavio and Johnny on the Pony and Hop Scotch. Jesus when I think of it we did a hell of a lot things then. There was a kid, we used to call him Iron Back because he could hold up pretty near the whole gang on his back and when we played Johnny on the Pony and you landed on Iron Back's back, boy, you knew it! It was as hard as a rock. There was another kid, Uncle Snot we used to call him. He was the dirtiest looking specimen I ever laid my eyes on. I remember he was always "It" when we played Chase the White Horse. I'll tell you. Let's see. Yeah, now first we'd all line up on the curb and somebody was "it". We always picked Uncle Snot the first time.

2

Everybody could bop him around. We line up behind Natie who was the leader of the gang and Uncle Snot is right off the curb in front of Natie and he is bending over like when you play leap frog. So first you have to perform three initiations on him. So Natie used to start it off. He used to say "Eagles Grip!" And then we'd all do the Eagle's Grip on Uncle Snot's back. You held your hands like claws and then zino! you dug them into his back. That was the Eagle's Grip. Then maybe we'd give him Brush the Collar. That one you took a sock like this. (Slanting blow with the palm of the hand on the back of the neck) Then there was another initiation called "Shoot the Cannon". That was a hot one. You got behind the guy who was "it" and you let him have it right in the pizazza and boy did he fly! Then there was Dump the Apple Cart but we didn't do that one much because it was hell on the spine of the guy who was "it" You jumped over him like in leap frog but instead of landing on your feet, you landed on the end of the guy's spine and if you did it right he'd

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go over like a light. There were other initiations I think but I can't remember them. Well, so when we got through with the initiations there were other things we used to do before Natie would hollar, "chase the white horse" and give the guy who was "it" a chance to nab somebody else. But the guy who was "it" never knew when the leader was gonna call Chase the White Horse. One of the things we used to do before Chase the White Horse was Elephants in a Row. The first guy would hollar "elephants in a row!" Then he would jump over the back of the guy who was "It" and he would get down next to him so the next guy had to jump over two guys' backs. And then three and then four and so on. So sometimes depending on how many guys were playing, you had to jump over ten backs and if you missed and landed on the pile you were automatically "it".

3

Then there was Trees in a Row which went like this. You jumped over the back and where you landed that's where you had to stay. Then you would stick your hands out like branches and if the next guy touched you when he jumped over, he was "it". By the time it got around to the last guy, it was a pretty mean business to land without touching anybody. Then there was Dead Men in a Row which was just like Elephants in a Row except instead of kneeling like in leap frog you lay out straight and the guy behind you had to clear you on the jump. Sometimes you got landed on. Jesus! I don't know how we used to take it. Another one we did was Engine Number Nine. This was my meat. I'd always be the last guy in Engine Number Nine. You worked it like this. The first guy would wrap his mitts around the lamp post and the next guy would hold on to one of his legs picking it off the ground. And each guy would pick up the other guy's leg like that and when it was all set like that in a chain, each guy with one leg off the ground, we would pull the other guy's leg like all hell and we'd hollar, "Engine Number Nine!" three times and if anybody let go the other guy's leg, he was "It". If nobody let go, the same guy as before was "It". As soon as a new guy was it he had to go through the initiations. Then there was Lightening which went like this. The first guy would suddenly hollar "Lightening!" Then the guy who was "It" had to count one two three four five six seven eight nine ten — and it everybody wasn't off

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the sidewalk by that time all he had to do was tag a guy who was still on the sidewalk and that guy was "it." When the leader was through with all the initiations and the other things he knew, he usually would hollar, "chase the white horse" and as soon as he hollered that he would jump over the back of the guy who was "it" and start running down 4 the street. Then the next guy would jump over and follow the leader and so on. When the last guy had jumped over the back of the guy who was "It" the guy who was "it" had to count ten and then he would start to chase the gang. That was the best part of the game. The leader could go anywhere on the block and you had to follow him and do whatever he did. Natie used to raise hell when he was the leader. He used to run in the alleys and bang the garbage pails as he passed by. What a racket that made! Sometimes Old Man Klinke the Superintendent would come running out and swear at us in Polish. Sometimes we'd follow Natie upon the roof and raise hell up there. If the guy who was "It" tagged somebody before the leader got through and came back home, the guy who was tagged became "it" and we started all over again. But the way we worked it Uncle Snot was always it, first because he was the slowest runner and second because even if he did nab somebody, nobody would stick up for him. When Uncle Snot got tired the game was over. Another game we used to play was called Pinch and Ouch. This is how it went. One guy was "it" and the rest of us used to line up side by side in the gutter. The guy on one end was called Pinch and the guy on the other end was called Ouch. Then we'd all grab hands and start moving up the street, with the guy who was "it" out in front. He had to keep his distance in front otherwise he would get a boot in the can from someone on the line if he came too close. Then the Pinch guy would pinch the hand of the guy next to him and so on until the Ouch guy got it on the other end. When he got it he was supposed to hollar OUCH! This was the signal for everybody to turn around and run like hell back to the sewer which was the base. If the guy who was "it" tagged somebody before he reached the base, the guy who was tagged became "it". We used to yell while we marched up the street, 5 "Fifty feet away! Fifty feet away! The captain used to say! Now we gotcha! Now we gotcha.! Waddya got to say!" I can't think of anymore offhand. The names of the kids? Well there was Uncle Snot and Iron Back and myself, they used to call me Bo Evil or just Bo. Then there was

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Natie and his brother Blackie and his other brother Chink or Itzhuck we sometimes called him. There was Hymie Poop, Two In Georgie, Johnny O'Brien who turned out to be a good soccer player. There was Whitey and Blinkey and Murray and his brother who we called Ogre Moishe. There was a guy we called Home News because he used to deliver the Home News. It was a tough neighborhood. We didn't play games all the time. (When we got a little older we stopped chasing the white horse and started chasing the girls, yeh, and instead of shooting the cannon we began to shoot the dice. And plenty of other things. Yeah and then I went to College, but it didn't exactly reform me.)